United Nations A/54/854

General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 May 2000

Original: English

Fifty-fourth session
Agenda items 114 and 116 (b)

Elimination of racism and racial discrimination

Human rights questions: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Letter dated 1 May 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Slovenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the Joint Statement and the Framework Programme of Action adopted by the Portorož Conference on Inter-Ethnic Relations and Minorities in South-Eastern Europe (see annex). The Conference on Inter-Ethnic Relations and Minorities in South-Eastern Europe was co-organized by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and the Council of Europe within the Framework of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe and was held on 16 and 17 March 2000 in Portorož, Slovenia, with the participation of Stability Pact participating States and other interested States and international organizations.

Inter-ethnic relations in parts of south-eastern Europe have been seriously strained or have collapsed altogether. The pursuit of multi-ethnic and multicultural coexistence and cooperation is of vital importance for developing prosperous, stable and vibrant societies in individual countries as well as for the peace, development and stability of the region as a whole.

The Framework Programme of Action, adopted together with the Joint Statement and the List of Projects at the Portorož Conference, is based on the expressed strong commitment of all Stability Pact participating countries to support activities aimed at the promotion and rehabilitation of multi-ethnic societies in countries of south-eastern Europe, based on shared universal values and standards of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the protection of minorities, democracy and the rule of law. The Framework Programme of Action shall call for development of national action plans, as well as joint projects addressing common concerns of south-eastern Europe.

The Conference participants indicated the following priorities for action: awareness-raising campaign; implementation of existing commitments; research, education and training; and the situation of Roma, an often neglected and

00-41592 (E) 150500

marginalized minority. The Conference also identified numerous existing good practices and processes in the region and other parts of Europe.

The objective of the Portorož Conference was to define the content and the scope of the activities needed in the field of inter-ethnic relations and minority protection in south-eastern Europe. The Conference was therefore not an end in itself but rather the beginning of a longer-term follow-up process.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 114 and 116 (b).

(*Signed*) Samuel **Žbogar**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

Annex to the letter dated 1 May 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Slovenia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Joint Statement and Framework Programme of Action adopted by the Portorož Conference on Inter-Ethnic Relations and Minorities in South-Eastern Europe

Portorož, 17 March 2000

JOINT STATEMENT

The Conference on Inter-Ethnic Relations and Minorities took place on 16 and 17 March 2000 in Portorož, Slovenia. The conference was co-organized by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia and the Council of Europe within the framework of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

Both the Stability Pact, adopted in Cologne on 10 June 1999, as well as Sarajevo Summit Declaration, adopted on 30 July 1999, reaffirm the importance of preserving the multinational and multiethnic diversity of countries in the region and protecting minorities. Indeed, the genuine promotion and protection of human dignity and rights - based on the recognition of equality while preserving diversity throughout South Eastern Europe - is crucial for the true success of the Stability Pact.

Tragedies that have afflicted South Eastern Europe stem to a large extent from unresolved national problems exploited by unscrupulous leaders seeking mono-ethnic solutions. They stem from ethno-nationalistic drives for superiority of one group over the other. If not countered, nationalistic tendencies perpetuate a vicious continued circle.

South Eastern European countries characterized by complex mosaics of distinct ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious and other groups or communities. The "nation-state" driven perception becomes inadequate and obsolete as many of those groups or communities throughout the region strive not only for their rights but all too often for their very existence and recognition.

While recognizing that there can be no uniform approach, there is however a common need for preservation or (wherever necessary) rehabilitation of multiethnic and multicultural society based on democratic citizenship in all countries of South Eastern Europe. Ethnocentric thinking needs to be replaced by a plurality of mutually enriching identities whereby a majority not only recognizes a minority but affords it additional rights, if need be, for the realization of true equality.

The pursuit of multi-ethnic and multicultural coexistence and cooperation, based on shared European standards of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the protection of minorities, is of vital importance for developing prosperous, stable and vibrant societies in individual countries as well as for the peace, development and stability of the region as a whole.

Moreover, socio-economic development and prosperity as well as overall security are fundamental bases for sustained long-term multi-ethnicity and multiculturalism. Continuous coordination with other Stability Pact endeavors, including those conducted within Working Table on Economic Development and Cooperation and Working Table on Security, is therefore essential.

Given that inter-ethnic relations in parts of South Eastern Europe have been seriously strained or have collapsed altogether, the long-term process of inter-ethnic rehabilitation will need sustained and concerted support first and foremost in individual South Eastern European countries as well as by the international community of states and international organizations, including expert institutions and non-governmental organizations. Minorities themselves will need to be afforded possibilities for true participation in this process if it is to succeed.

The Portorož conference reaffirmed the commitment of participating states to the existing international standards regarding human rights and the protection of minorities. Participants pledge to pursue policies and measures to enhance human dignity of individuals in order to promote tolerance and the mutual enrichment that multiethnic societies provide.

The objectives of the Stability Pact are to be translated into concrete action based on the Report of the Special Delegation of Council of Europe Advisors on Minorities, this Joint Statement, the Framework Program of Action and the List of Projects. These should be basic elements to be considered in the development of national action plans. Individual countries of South Eastern Europe commit themselves to developing their national action plans, tailored to their individual needs, while taking into account the need for cooperation with other states.

The conference identified numerous existing good practices and good processes in the region as well as in other parts of Europe, such as enhancement of participation of minorities in the conduct of public affairs through adequate direct representation of minorities in local government and national parliaments, appropriate level of self-administration, provisions and measures ensuring adequate shares of persons belonging to minorities among public officials, the institution of the minority rights ombudsman in ethnically plural countries. Such good practices and processes proved to be useful examples worth following, as appropriate, elsewhere and are accordingly to form a substantial part of the Framework Program of Action and national action plans.

The Portorož conference calls upon the Stability Pact to give strong and ongoing support to the endeavors aimed at fostering inter-ethnic relations and enhancement of the protection of minorities.

Interested countries may wish to express their additional commitments and develop further projects considering good practices, good processes and proposals for commitments listed in the Report of the Special Delegation of Council of Europe Advisors on Minorities.

FRAMEWORK PROGRAM OF ACTION

I.

The Framework Program of Action (FPA), adopted together with the Joint Statement at the Portorož conference, is based on the expressed strong commitment of all Stability Pact participating countries to support activities aimed at promotion and rehabilitation of multiethnic societies, where necessary, in countries of South Eastern Europe, based on shared universal values and standards of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The inaugural meeting of the Stability Pact Working Table on Democratisation and Human Rights on 18 and 19 October 1999 in Geneva welcomed the convening of the Portorož Conference on Inter-Ethnic Relations and Minorities and mandated the Special Delegation of the Council of Europe, in co-operation with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to conduct a series of consultations at the regional level with regard to human rights and minority problems.

The final report of the Special Delegation of CoE Advisors on Minorities submitted to the Portorož Conference and the List of Projects adopted by the Task Force on Human Rights and Minorities serve as the basis for this FPA that shall call for the development of national action plans, as well as joint projects addressing common concerns of South Eastern Europe. Plans should be transparent and exposed to public opinion.

II.

Expressing their support for projects adopted by the Task Force on Human Rights and Minorities at Ljubljana meeting (17 February 2000), the conference participants indicate the following priorities:

- Awareness-Raising Campaign

The campaign, to be successful must be based on a strong commitment by the countries concerned and on shared goals region-wide of the promotion of multi-ethnic society and democratic citizenship. The implementation of these goals through the campaign requires the setting up of a two-tiered structure: a European organizing committee and a series of national committees in each country.

The Awareness-Raising Campaign is envisaged to be carried out in a variety of fields, such as: media, culture, youth and education, civil society and government, parliament and administration. The activities planned within the framework of the Awareness-Raising Campaign will be of many different kinds, for example: public events, youth events and exchanges, cultural programmes and exchanges, festivals, NGO initiatives, media features, public hearings, seminars, workshops, grass-roots and town-hall initiatives, sport events, competitions and prizes, business ventures, internet communication, scientific research, exchanges and publications, return assistance, confidence building and reconciliation etc.

- Implementation of existing commitments

The level of protection of minorities in a democratic society should be considered a key indicator of democratic success. Participants emphasize the importance of fully implementing the existing obligations and commitments by enhancing the monitoring role of appropriate mechanisms at the national and international level, such as, inter alia, UN mechanisms, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Council of Europe's mechanisms including the Advisory Committee under the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and, as appropriate, to give the widest possible dissemination to their findings. In this context, the conference strongly recommended that states quickly ratify and implement all relevant conventions regarding the protection of minorities. The conference also welcomes the initiative to launch a non-discrimination review.

The conference encourages states to participate actively in regional structures and their programs relevant to minorities and multiethnic societies (such as the CEI).

- Research, education and training

Research of the existing diversity, ethnic relations and the protection of minorities and the implementation of research findings for the improvement of interethnic relations are vitally important for the stability and democratic development of multiethnic societies. The Stability Pact also recognizes the need for continuous, systematic and coordinated research in this field for the successful realization of its objectives. This requires cooperation and coordination of relevant research institutions at the national and international levels.

Research findings provide key sources for the development of adequate education and training programs aimed at the promotion of tolerance, coexistence and equal cooperation in multiethnic societies. Such education and training programs based on the concept of democratic citizenship can promote also adequate participation of minorities.

- Roma

Promotion and rehabilitation of multi-ethnic society should involve special attention for an often neglected and marginalized minority – the Roma. Therefore, a comprehensive political strategy at the regional level must be adopted to ensure formal recognition of Roma as a distinct group with specific features, needs and aspirations, and to put an end to discrimination against Roma. These projects should promote specific programs of affirmative action especially in areas such as education and culture, employment, housing, health care, etc. Projects should assist Roma in forming their own associations, particularly those on a countrywide basis.

The participating countries and organizations support the particular projects on Roma submitted to all Working Tables and Task Forces of the Stability Pact. They furthermore suggest the creation of a mechanism to ensure that Roma concerns are given proper attention in all appropriate activities of the Stability Pact, for example the establishment of a regional working group to coordinate policies and projects.

III.

The Portorož conference recalled the Declaration adopted on 11 December 1999 by the participants to the first Kosovo International Human Rights Conference and endorsed it as a welcome example of civil society support for multi-ethnic society. It strongly recommended that the declaration be taken into account for the envisaged awareness-raising campaign, as well as for the civil society conference to be convened.

The participants stressed the need to support democratic forces in Serbia.

Participants noted the efforts undertaken by Montenegro to implement democratic reforms and an effective programme of minority protection. In response to Montenegro's request for assistance, they agreed to continued and increased level of support, in particular by international organizations, such as the Council of Europe.

IV.

The conference reaffirms the importance of co-operation with all other ongoing and proposed activities of the Stability Pact, taking into account the need for synergy between its three basic pillars – Democracy and Human Rights, Economic Development and Co-operation and Security. It is particularly important to establish close co-ordination with various other projects which are being prepared in the framework of the Working Table I of the Stability Pact, particularly in areas such as education, media, return of refugees and internally displaced persons, good governance, ombudsmen and national human rights institutions.

No program or measure for the improvement of ethnic relations and the promotion of multiethnic society can be successful without the active involvement at the grass-root level. The conference expressed strong support to the ongoing efforts and activities of the non-governmental organizations.

V.

All Stability Pact activities and the realization of adopted projects will need to be reviewed in order to assure consistency of the overall approach and to anchor the commitments taken by individual states to concrete results in the ground. An important role in this respect could be played by the continued work of the Special Delegation of Council of Europe Advisors on Minorities. As a part of this evaluation process we suggest that an evaluation conference take place one year from now.